DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 552 JC 840 231

AUTHOR Rounds, Jeanine C.
TITLE Entrance Assessment at Community Colleges: A Decade of Change.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Achievement Tests; Community Colleges; *Educational Diagnosis; *Educational Trends; Literature Reviews; *Student Placement; *Testing Programs; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This chronological review of research and educational literature traces the growth in the use of standardized and locally developed assessment instruments in community colleges over the past decade. The literature review covers the following aspects of the issue of student assessment: (1) studies from the early 1970's showing a negative attitude toward testing among California community colleges, and the predominance of the American College Testing Program (ACT) tests among colleges that did assess their students; (2) the increased incidence of mandatory testing programs; (3) the increase in the use of locally developed tests; and (4) the expansion of the skill areas being tested and the purposes for which the test scores were used. (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED243552

ENTRANCE ASSESSMENT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A DECADE OF CHANGE

Jeanine C. Rounds, Ed.D.
Coordinator of Learning Skills
Yuba College
Marysville, CA 95901

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. C. Rounds

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

JC 840 231

ENTRANCE ASSESSMENT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A DECADE OF CHANGE

With the increasing demand for accountability in education, a major change in entrance procedures is taking place in community colleges. Although many such colleges had practically eliminated entrance assessment in the past decade, interest has recently grown dramatically in finding test instruments that will effectively predict how students will perform in college. In many states, the two-year colleges are moving toward mandatory entrance testing; in some of these states such testing has even been legislated (Rounds, 1983).

The negative attitude towards tests at the beginning of the 1970's is revealed in several surveys of usage that were made in 1973. For example, Clark's 1973 survey of assessment practices in 77 community colleges in California found 24 indicating no testing, and Clark concluded: "The direction now seems to be 'no test required,'" with colleges using a variety of other information for placement--if indeed they placed--from high school records to special courses to counselor or teacher judgment. In addition, Clark (1973b) found considerable dissatisfaction voiced by schools that did use tests.

Forty-six schools (60 percent) used the ACT, but only 33 percent of the users were satisfied with it, and 40 percent (19 of the 46 responding schools) said they

planned to change instruments. Thirty-six colleges (48 percent) indicated they used the SAT; again, only 33 percent were satisfied with it. Fifty-five percent of the 27 users of the SCAT were satisfied. Overall, the satisfaction with all the instruments used was only about 35 percent; however, 19 percent did not respond to the question. Clark indicated that most of the dissatisfaction seemed to stem from the tests' perceived poor use for English placement, the major purpose of entrance assessment.

In another 1973 study, specifically focusing on English placement practices at California community colleges, Becker received responses from 62 colleges. Thirteen percent used no form of placement. Forty-eight of the schools (89 percent responding to this question) indicated use of an objective exam for placement, and 43 percent used both an objective exam and a sample essay; 7 percent used only an essay. The test with the highest use for placement was the ACT, with 36 percent using it; 17 percent used the SCAT; only 13 percent used the SAT. Only 35 percent indicated they were satisfied with the effectiveness of the exams, with another 17 percent saying they were "somewhat" satisfied; 25 percent were not satisfied, and another 23 percent did not respond.

Although only 16 schools (26 percent) said they gave students a reading test, 40 colleges mentioned use of a specific reading test on another part of the questionnaire. Of this group, 13 schools (33 percent) used the Nelson-Denny.

A third 1973 survey of California community colleges specifically examined remedial programs (Ainge); this study received responses from those responsible for the remedial reading programs in 62 schools. Ainge found that 32 colleges (52 percent) indicated use of the SAT, a much higher figure than found by Becker, but comparable to Clark's data. The SCAT was used by 25 schools (40 percent; again, closer to Clark's data than Becker's). Seventeen schools (27 percent) said they used the Cooperative English Test, and eight (13 percent) used the Nelson-Denny Reading Test.

In a study of North Carolina's and Virginia's 1974 assessment practices, Ford and Campos (1977) found there were almost as many programs and methods as there were schools. Most were concerned with identifying students functioning below college level in math and English.

Walters' 1975 survey of English assessment in 64 California community colleges determined that 48 schools (64 percent) were using a standardized test for English placement, down slightly from Becker's data. The most commonly used instrument was the Cooperative English Test. Half of these 48 schools also required a writing sample, and 7 (11 percent) used only a writing sample.

A 1978 survey of Washington state community colleges by Venneri provided some significant differences from the earlier surveys, both in percent of test users and in types of instruments chosen. This difference may reflect different preferences in geographical areas, but no doubt

also reflects changes in instruments available and in testing philosophy.

The Washington study found that all but three of the state's 27 community colleges (89 percent) required testing for placement or advising. The state-developed Washington College Placement Test was used by 18 schools (67 percent), the SAT by 8 (30 percent), the ACT by 8 (30 percent), and the SCAT by only 1 school. The Comparative Guidance and Placement Program (new in the '70s) was in use by only 5 schools (19 percent), and the Test of Standard Writing Skills (which had been introduced in 1975) was used by only one school. Nine schools (33 percent) used a locally designed writing test, and standardized reading tests of various kinds were used by nine schools.

Venneri (1978) concluded that use of locally-designed tests was increasing. He also found that the most frequent use of the placement data was for English classes, with 78 percent of the schools using a cut-off point for English placement, while only 17 percent used a cut-off score for mathematics placement. Fifty-two percent had mandatory placement in English and 37 percent in math.

Roueche and Snow, who conducted a national survey of 139 community colleges in 1977, found 83 percent indicated they offered diagnostic or assessment services, although it was not clear what percent of students used these services. Of these colleges 37.4 percent used the ACT and 18.7 used the SAT. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test

was used by 41 percent, while a majority, 51.8 percent, also used locally designed tests.

Mangum's 1979 study found that 25 of 88 responding California community colleges, less than a third, required assessment for mathematics. Forty-four (50 percent) required an English placement test.

Manspeaker, in a 1980 survey of assessment practices at Oregon's 13 community colleges, found that, although locally-designed tests were in use, the majority of Oregon's schools used published materials, with the CGP having the most use. The NDRT was also used by many.

In Fall, 1981, 14 community colleges in northern California joined to form LARC, the Learning, Assessment, and Retention Consortium, to share their data and work together to improve their assessment and retention strategies. In addition to pooling their data, they planned to develop an assessment model for use by the Consortium. The results of their initial study reflected the wide-spread diversity among test users.

A survey of 1980 practices by this group of colleges indicates that testing was mandatory for English placement in five of the 14 schools, and advised in four. Reading assessment, math assessment, and testing for English as a Second Language were mandatory in only two of the schools. Two schools also required assessment for automotive technology courses, and two required assessment for business courses; only one required a reading test.

The only reading tests mentioned more than once were the Nelson-Denny, used in five schools, and the Davis, used in two.

In writing assessment, six schools used locally developed tests, and other tests were each mentioned once only. Four ESL tests were named, in addition to the two locally developed tests used by two schools; three schools mentioned the Michigan Test of English Language and Performance. Eight schools indicated some mathematics testing, with three of those using a college-developed test. Two schools used the Cooperative Mathematics Test, and three others are mentioned once (LARC, 1982).

Ramey's survey of 29 Florida community colleges (1981) found that 7 of the 21 colleges that assessed for reading skills used the Nelson-Denny (24.1 percent of the total), and 6 campuses used a locally-designed instrument (20.7 percent). Fifteen of the schools assessed English writing ability of entering students, and 8 of these (27.6 percent of the total) used a locally-developed instrument. Of the six colleges using a standardized instrument, three used the CGP. General English usage was assessed in 19 of the colleges, 11 of which used a standardized test. The most often named were the ACT and the CGP, each used by four colleges.

Ramey found that 24 colleges (82.8 percent) reported they assessed mathematics skills of entering students. Fifteen of these (51.7 percent of the total) used a

standardized test, with the ACT used by 4 schools and the CGP used by 3. Nine campuses (31 percent) used a campus-developed instrument.

In an unpublished study of English placement tests, Mognis (1982) reported responses from English departments in 99 California community colleges. Only four of those respondents indicated no use of a placement test.

Those responding could name more than one placement instrument. Forty-nine, or 49 percent of those answering, indicated they used some type of written sample, from paragraph to essay. There was a wide range of general tests, with 9 users of the SAT (9 percent of the total), 8 users of the SCAT (8 percent), 7 users of the ACT (7 percent), and 6 each using the CET and CGP (6 percent each). Five colleges each reported using the Nelson-Denny and the TSWE (5 percent each); 3 used the Stanford Test of Academic Skills (3 percent), and 36 reported using a wide variety of miscellaneous tests. Some of the placement testing took place at entrance and some occurred in classrooms.

The recent report of the California Postsecondary Education Committee's report on remedial education (CPEC, 1983) indicated that 59 percent of 101 community colleges required assessment in writing, although reading assessment tended to be voluntary. It stated that there were nearly as many procedures and instruments as there were colleges.

Rounds' 1983 survey of 99 California community colleges (94 percent of the total) found that 85 colleges (86 percent) required or recommended assessment for English placement, with 55 of those colleges requiring it. Of those 55, 13 colleges used locally developed instruments, 9 used the Cooperative English, and 4 each used the Comparative Guidance and Placement (CGP), the Nelson-Denny, the SCAT, and the Test of Standard Written English. Other miscellaneous tests were used by 1 or 2 colleges. None required the ACT, and only 1 required the SAT.

Reading assessment was required by 32 colleges and recommended by 43, for a total of 75 (76 percent). For the colleges requiring reading assessment, the Nelson-Denny was used by 10 colleges, the Coop and the Davis by 4 each. None required the ACT or SAT. Only 2 colleges required a locally-developed reading test.

Twenty-five colleges required math assessment, with 42 recommending it, for a total of 67 (67 percent). Ten of those requiring math assessment used locally-developed tests, 5 used the SCAT, and 3 used the Coop. None required ACT or SAT.

The varied levels of usage and lack of real consistency in choices was indication there was little agreement as to which instruments were effective with community college students. Some commentators had serious reservations about the value of such major standardized tests as the ACT and SAT

with the majority of community college students. Many of the respondents indicated, however, that the assessment programs at their campuses were undergoing major evaluation and that significant changes were probably underway. Some experssed a need for more information and opportunity for information exchange with their colleagues.

Recognizing the concerns as well as the growing market, in 1984 both ACT and ETS had moved to provide new tests especially for community college students, with ACT's Asset being piloted in Southern California and ETS's new test now available. In addition, ETS has a new diagnostic test, to be taken at the computer, using branching questions, still being developed.

In the meantime, the Chancellor's Office of the California Community College System is also piloting its Matriculation project, and it seems fairly clear that the nation's largest community college system will soon follow the leads of such states as Florida, Georgia, and New Jersey in mandating entrance assessment. The Age of Assessment is upon us.

Ainge, Kenneth Edward
1973 "Guidlines for the evaluation of community college remedial education programs." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University.

Becker, George
1973 Current Practices of Placing Students in English Composition Courses in the California Community Colleges: Some Answere to Questions asked in an "English Placement Questionnaire." ERIC ED 073 749.

Clark, Robert M.
1973a California Community College Testing Survey. ERIC ED 075 027.

Clark, Robert M.
1973b A Trial Administration of the Comparative Guidance and Placement Program. ERIC ED 086 292.

CPEC
1983 Promises to Keep: Remedial Education in California's Public Colleges and Universities. Eds. Joan S. Sallee and Jan Coffey. California Postsecondary Education Commission.

Ford, Susan F. and Sandy Campos
1977 Summary of Validity Data From the Admissions Test Program Validity Study Service. ERIC ED 148 869.

Magnum. Clarence
1979 Basic Skills Study Report. Unpublished paper. Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. Sacramento.

Manspeaker, Jewell
1980 "Controlling the revolving door in the 1980's." In One State's Effort to Get Serious About High-Risk Student: Assessment, Faculty Advising, Career Planning, and Developmental Education in Oregon's Community Colleges. Ed. Jerome A. Johnson ERIC ED 188 732.

Mognis, Robert
1982 1981-1982 English Workload Study. Unpublished study prepared for English Council of California Two Year Colleges. Fresno College.

Ramey, Llewellen
1981 "Assessment Procedures for Students Entering Florida Community Colleges: Theory and Practice." Unpublished doctorial dessertation, University of Florida.

Roueche, John E. and Jerry Snow
1977 Overcoming Learning Problems: A Guide to Developmental Education in College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Rounds, Jeanine C.
1983 "Admissions, Placement, and Competency: Assessment Practices in California Community Colleges, 1982-1983." Unpublished doctoral disseration, Brigham Young University.

Venneri, Rick
1976 Report to the Faculty: Student Assessment Academic Transfer. ERIC ED 118 184.

Walters, Henry R.
1975 English Placement Survey. ERIC ED 115 335.

ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

JUN 8 1984

8118 Math-Sciences Building
Los Angeles, California 90024